

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL  
17 December 1986REPORT SOUTHERN AIR FLEW ARMS TO AMIN  
NEW YORK

CIA agents working for an airline linked to the Iran arms-Contra aid scandal flew weapons to Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in the mid-1970s despite a U.S. military embargo, a report published Wednesday said.

Citing depositions from a Security and Exchange Commission suit that were ordered sealed by the CIA, the Village Voice said the covert activities in Uganda began in 1975 and continued during Vice President George Bush's tenure as CIA director.

The operations started as a joint U.S.-Israeli spying operation against Amin using two airlines as cover but when the dictator asked for military assistance, the CIA decided to go along because it did not want to lose the intelligence agents gathered in their roles as flight crew members and pilots, the newspaper said.

One of the airlines, Southern Air Transport of Miami, has been implicated in the scheme to fly weapons to the Middle East for Iran and to Central America for the Contra rebels fighting the Nicaraguan government.

The CIA spying mission was an outgrowth of Israeli surveillance of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, the Voice reported. The Israelis had been using an airline as cover for spying in Libya and provided the plane, pilot and crew for Gadhafi.

When Amin, reportedly impressed by Gadhafi's plane, asked if he could get one for himself, the Israeli company contacted an American transport firm, Page Airways Corp. of Rochester, N.Y.

That firm obliged with two planes and then subcontracted with Southern Air Transport to provide the personnel to fly the the planes for Amin.

In Washington, CIA spokeswoman Sharon Foster said, "We do not confirm or deny allegations of agency activities."

The Voice said several members of the crews sent by Southern Air, which was owned by the CIA from 1960 to 1974, were CIA spies.

Within a year, Amin demanded that the crews begin smuggling weapons into the West African country and assist in military operations against rebels seeking to topple his brutal regime, the paper said.

The United States had an arms embargo against Uganda at the time because of rampant human rights violations, but the CIA decided to go along with Amin's request.

The newspaper said one pilots, in a deposition given in a 1978 SEC suit against Page Airways, described how the two American airlines smuggled military equipment from the United States, transported bombs from Somalia and flew Ugandan soldiers into battles against insurgents trying to topple Amin.

Page Airways has since been reorganized as Page Avjet and is based in Florida.

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At the time of the CIA operation, two ex- CIA agents were acting as special advisers to Amin. Frank Terpil and Edwin Wilson were working under a \$3.2 million contract, supplying the dictator with explosives, communications gear and torture equipment.

They joined the dictator's flight into exile after his overthrow. Terpil, now a fugitive, was convicted in absentia in New York in 1980 of conspiring to sell 10,000 machine guns, 10 million rounds of ammunition and lethal poisons to two undercover agents posing as Latin American revolutionaries.

Wilson is in prison for trying to kill two prosecutors and six witnesses against him in a case charging him with aiding Gadhafi in Libya.